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SUBJECT: ADEN WOMEN'S GROUPS REACH OUT TO ISLAMIC AND SECURITY AUTHORITIES

REF: A. SANAA 04 2385

[B](#). SANAA 611

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. May 31 and June 1 Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff met with several women's rights groups in Aden, a vibrant port city with a long-standing tradition of social activism. In anticipation of 2006 local council elections, women's groups are busy lobbying political parties in support of a 30 percent quota for female candidates. Not waiting for Yemen's conservative, male-dominated society to recognize women as a political force, female activists are finding innovative ways to advance the status of women, including recruiting religious figures, building coalitions across political parties, and cooperating with local authorities to combat trafficking in women. End Summary.

Aden National Women's Committee Co-opts Local Imams

[1](#)2. (U) The Women's National Committee (WNC) is a ROYG sponsored organization established to advance the political, economic, and social status of women in Yemen. Aden Branch Chair, Qublah Mohamed Saeed, discussed WNC's efforts to increase women's political participation. The WNC backs the proposed 30 percent quota for female candidates in the 2006 local council elections, but acknowledged that the political parties will likely only accept a 10 percent quota nationally, if any (ref A). Women cannot rely on the quota system to bridge the gender gap, said Saeed, but must also focus on developing a long-term strategy to change attitudes about the role of women.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Saeed shared an innovative outreach program to co-opt local Islamic leaders in the campaign to improve the condition of southern Yemeni women. The Aden WNC reached out to local Imams to improve girl's health, particularly with regard to the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). The program brought religious leaders, medical professionals, and activists together to discuss the negative health implications of FGM. Once educated, the Imams spread awareness of FGM in their mosque sermons, warning people of the health consequences and dispelling the belief that female circumcision is a religious duty sanctioned by Islam. (Note: For additional information on FGM in Yemen see G/Office of International Women's Issues June 1, 2001 report. End Note).

[1](#)4. (SBU) Pleasantly surprised by the Imam's willingness to discuss, let alone tackle, such a sensitive issue, the WNC Aden Branch hopes to repeat the program's success with a new initiative focusing on Sharia as the basis for expanding women's legal rights.

Strength in Numbers

[1](#)5. (U) Fatima Muraisi, Chairwoman of the Yemeni Women's Union (Aden branch) and local council member, also expressed support for the proposed quota system. (Note: The YWU, an organization established by the socialists before unification, is nominally an NGO but maintains a close relationship with the ruling GPC. End note). Muraisi hoped that women can work together to build coalitions across party lines, creating a united front to encourage reticent party members to support greater gender equality, particularly within the conservative Islah party. YWU in Aden is also focusing on building a coalition to lobby for the passage of several draft election laws calling for such measures as a mandated female member on the Supreme Election Committee, and a women's sub-committee in all local election commissions. Echoing the NWC, Muraisi stressed that a grassroots public awareness campaign is needed to change prevailing conservative views on women in politics, including among Yemeni women.

Local Police Cooperate to Help Women in Trouble

[1](#)6. (SBU) Raqiya Humeidan, President of the Arab Association for Supporting Women and Juveniles, discussed her new organization's efforts to provide legal and social services

to female prisoners and victims of domestic violence in Aden.

The Foundation struck up a unique relationship with local prisons. Humeidan explained that authorities traditionally will only release a woman into the custody of a male family member once their term has been served. However, many families disown their female relative when they are convicted of crimes, leaving these women imprisoned indefinitely without cause once they have served even short sentences for minor crimes.

17. (SBU) According to Humeidan, the authorities sometimes release woman into the custody of a pimp posing as family member. In exchange for securing their release, these women may find themselves in coercive, exploitative situations. Unable to return home and lacking job skills, some former female prisoners turn to prostitution as the only viable economic option. In a new arrangement the police now contact the Foundation to give it custody of women who are ready for release but have been abandoned by their families. Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff toured the organization's small women's shelter. A make shift safe haven, the facility currently has the capacity to shelter only a handful of women. The organization hopes to expand its shelter facilities, as well as provide job skills training in order to combat potential sex trafficking.

18. (SBU) Comment: Due to Aden's long history with civil society, southern-based women groups are ahead of the pack in comparison to the rest of the country. These Women's groups are making a serious effort to alter societal views on the role of women in political life, improve women's health, and create a future for women who would otherwise have none. Their grassroots programs and innovative outreach efforts can serve as a model for women's rights organizations and activists across Yemen. The Arab Association for Supporting Women and Juveniles' shelter, still in its infancy, is an excellent candidate for much needed G/TIP assistance as the first known NGO attempt to prevent Yemeni women and girls from becoming victims of internal sex trafficking. End Comment.
Krajeski